

Mikołaj Szołtysek, *Rethinking East-Central Europe: Family Systems and Co-residence in The Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth*, 2 vols, Bern: Peter Lang, 2015, vol. 1: *Contexts and Analyses*, vol. 2: *Data Quality Assessments, Documentation, and Bibliography*, 1062 pp.

Nearly half a century ago, thanks to English historians gathered around Peter Laslett in the Cambridge Group, there emerged in world historiography a new trend devoted to studies of family and household forms based on nominative censuses. Initially, this was about getting to know the process of household formation, the internal structure of households as well as their size in Europe and other parts of the world.<sup>1</sup> Some time later, without abandoning the discussion and the disputes over the European model of marriage proposed by John Hajnal and the family models proposed by Laslett,<sup>2</sup> scholars began to pay more attention to exploring the family life-cycle (life-cycle approach) and the life-cycle of the individual (life-course approach),<sup>3</sup> models of kinship and mechanisms of inheritance,<sup>4</sup> not to mention the whole tangled web of their environmental, socio-economic and demographic determinants. Research conducted in recent years seems to be characterized by an even more extensive application, in the studies of the geography of family forms and cohabitation models, of new methodologies, like the microsimulation demographic models.<sup>5</sup> For

<sup>1</sup> The beginning of the process was marked by two publications — *Household and Family in Past Time*, ed. Peter Laslett and Richard Wall, Cambridge, 1972; *Family Forms in Historic Europe*, ed. Richard Wall, Jean Robin and Peter Laslett, Cambridge, 1983.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. John Hajnal, 'Two Kinds of Pre-Industrial Household Formation System', in *Family Forms*, pp. 65–104; Peter Laslett, 'Family and Household as Work Group and Kin Group: Areas of Traditional Europe Compared', in *Family Forms*, pp. 513–63.

<sup>3</sup> For example Tamara K. Hareven, *Transitions. The Family and the Life Course in Historical Perspective*, New York, 1978; Reinhard Sieder, Michael Mitterauer, 'The Reconstruction of the Family Life Course: Theoretical Problems and Empirical Results', in *Family Forms*, pp. 309–45.

<sup>4</sup> See Gérard Delille, *Famille et propriété dans le royaume de Naples (XV<sup>e</sup>–XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle)*, Paris, 1985; Andrejs Plakans, *Kinship in the Past. An Anthropology of European Family Life 1500–1900*, Oxford, 1986; David Warren Sabean, *Kinship in Neckarhausen, 1700–1870*, Cambridge, 1998.

<sup>5</sup> For more on the topic, see Zhongwei Zhao, 'Computer Microsimulation and Historical Study of Social Structure: A Comparative Review of SOCISM and CAMSIM', *Revis-*

a long time Polish historians were barely visible within this research trend,<sup>6</sup> and it was not until the late twentieth century that more substantial studies by Michał Kopczyński and Cezary Kukło were published, studies devoted to the structure and size of peasant and burgher households in old Poland.<sup>7</sup> All in all, our knowledge of family forms in pre-industrial Poland was not very extensive. On the other hand in Western studies, owing to a lack of more extensive research, the Polish lands were usually included in the sphere of influence of the Eastern European family model.

That is why Mikołaj Szołtysek's study devoted to the formation of the peasant family and the structure of its household in the late eighteenth century should be welcomed. With its considerable length and territorial extensiveness of its source base, use of modern research methods and theories as well as the author's excellent knowledge of world and Polish literature on the subject, the book is a very successful contribution to the international discussion about the transformations in marital and family life, and its determinants in pre-industrial societies of the old continent. The vastness of the author's research horizons influenced his work, first in Cambridge and then in German M. Planck research centres (Rostock, Halle), where he found himself after obtaining his doctorate from the University of Wrocław in 2003. It should also be added that on the basis of the study under review M. Szołtysek received his post-doctoral (*habilitation*) degree from the Martin Luther University in Halle in 2015.

The book consists of three clearly distinct parts. The first (pp. 41–256) explores the positions of various international research trends and schools (including the oeuvres of Polish, Lithuanian and Belarusian historians) which have made their mark on the previous analyses of family forms on the old continent. In addition, the author discusses in it the principles, content and structure of the CEURFAMFORM source database and presents a concise analysis of socio-economic and cultural transformations taking place in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in the seventeenth–eighteenth centuries. In the second, longest part the author presents the results of his numerous analyses (pp. 269–769), while part three is devoted to the verification of the value of the sources used by the author and included in volume two (pp. 803–927). What constitutes an integral part of Szołtysek's two-volume study are often very detailed statistical

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*ta de Demografia Historica*, 24, 2006, 2, pp. 59–88. See also Mikołaj Szołtysek, 'Komputerowa mikrosymulacja sieci krewniaczej a wzorce współmieszkania: rzecz o demograficznych uwarunkowaniach rodziny chłopskiej w okresie staropolskim', *Przeszłość Demograficzna Polski*, 37, 2015, 1, pp. 107–61.

<sup>6</sup> The collection *Family Forms* includes Jacek Kochanowicz's paper, 'The Peasant Family as an Economic Unit in the Polish Feudal Economy of the Eighteenth Century'.

<sup>7</sup> Michał Kopczyński, *Studia nad rodziną chłopską w Koronie w XVII–XVIII wieku*, Warsaw, 1998 (4022 households from 1662 and 1410 households from 1791–92); Cezary Kukło, *Kobieta samotna w społeczeństwie miejskim u schyłku Rzeczypospolitej szlacheckiej. Studium demograficzno-społeczne*, Białystok, 1998 (5281 households in big cities and 672 in small towns from 1791–92).

tables — 83, graphs — 130 and maps — 7, featuring a variety of indicators. This huge statistical apparatus is impressive, but, it has to be said, does not facilitate reading, as is the case of the so-called Chicago-style footnotes, included in the main body of the text and sometimes taking up three, four lines.

The source base of Szołtysek's book comprises the surviving nominative listings for the Polish lands from the late eighteenth century, increasingly known with regard to their value to scholars, both those commissioned by the Civilian-Military Commission (1791–92) and those compiled for the purpose of the fifth Russian Revision, as well as the Church's *Libri status animarum* and *Seleen Register* known from German-speaking areas. Their exploration has enabled the author to create, with the help of his associates, the biggest computerized database for this part of the continent, a database with information about 26,654 peasant households from Silesia, Poland, Lithuania and Ukraine. In total, it comprises 234 parishes, with over 900 settlements and a total population of nearly 156,000 (p. 125).<sup>8</sup>

Worthy of note is the fact that in studying the models of family life organization in the Polish-Lithuanian state the author was particularly interested in differences in the composition of residential communities, intergenerational relations or family strategies approached in geographical terms. One of his research objectives was to test the relevancy of John Hajnal's famous line, drawn over half a century ago, running through our country and dividing Europe into models of population reproduction: western, with a predominance of nuclear families, and eastern, with a large share of complex families. Hence his right decision to group the collected data into twelve territories (Warmia, Greater Poland, Kuyavia, Ostrzeszów County, Wieluń County, Lesser Poland, Silesia, Chełm Land, Podolia, Zhytomir County, Central Belarus and Polessya), with the first seven located west of Hajnal's line and five east of it. Next they were combined by means of eight demographic variables into four larger territorial units referred to as regions (WEST — regions 1–7, EAST 1 — Chełm, Zhytomir, EAST 2 — Podolia, EAST 3 — Central Belarus and Polessya). Significantly, in his studies of co-residence of peasants towards the end of the feudal period in the Polish-Lithuanian state Szołtysek often used the CAMSIM (Cambridge Simulation) computer microsimulation developed in the 1980s. The combination of analyses of census microdata and microsimulations has made to possible, for example, to provide an estimate of the number of actually co-residing ancestors or a more precise description of the fulfilment of cultural expectations concerning the housing situation of various subpopulations in Poland and Lithuania.

The author begins his basic analyses from a broad demographic description of servants as a group in the analysed households, bearing in mind Hajnal's opinion that in Central Europe this group was apparently a sporadic component of households. Yet Szołtysek's research has revealed a considerable number of workers in peasant households in Poland and in Lithuania, although the

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<sup>8</sup> Gentry households are outside the author's research interest.

scale of the phenomenon, as the author stresses, differed strongly in territorial terms. The servants were much more numerous in western Poland (13.1% of the population) than in Belarus, especially Polessya (just 0.3% of the population). We find farmhands or maids in more than one-third of the households in Poland (39.3% of the total number of households), much less frequently in the Chełm Land and Zhytomir County (9.0%) and only exceptionally in Polessya (1.7%). The servant group, clearly dominated by men and clearly defeminised in eastern regions,<sup>9</sup> was made up of young people for whom service was usually a transition period in their lives, as most of them were below the average age at first marriage.<sup>10</sup>

Next the author discusses the most important event in his protagonists' life, namely marriage, focusing mainly on its two aspects: age at which they married and number of people who never married. In this he uses a whole range of methods to measure the phenomenon: mean and modal age at marriage, proportion between married and unmarried individuals aged 20–24, percentage of definitely celibate individuals aged 45–54 as well as two measures made popular in the European Fertility Project headed by Ansley J. Coale, namely index of nuptiality (*Im*) and index of married women (*Im\**) (pp. 409–11). Szołtysek is in no doubt that, irrespective of gender, regional nuptiality patterns in Poland varied greatly, not only in terms of the mean age at marriage (higher in the west and lower in the east) but also in terms of the initial and final stages of the process (he distinguishes three marriage systems in Poland-Lithuania, p. 428). Yet he notes that the mean age at first marriage in Polessya appears to be one of the lowest if not the lowest in Europe (p. 429). Thus rural communities in Poland and in Lithuania practically did not experience the definite bachelorhood and spinsterhood phenomenon, for those who were definitely celibate made up no more than 4% of the male population and about 5% of the women in the west, and less than 1% in eastern regions.

What should be noted in Szołtysek's analyses is his reflection on the process of taking charge of the household (pp. 493–583), because, like many Western scholars, he regards it as the basic decision-making unit, not only with regard to housing, consumption or social security, but also — as I would like to stress — to most phenomena studied from the demographic perspective. Entering headship among peasants in the western regions of the Polish-Lithuanian state was more rapid than in the east, but time spent as head of household was relatively short. On the other hand, the status of head of household was attained later in the east, but was more common and lifelong. It could be said,

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<sup>9</sup> According to the author, the predominance of male servants in the East may have been associated with highly patriarchal features of family organization in the region as well as various aspects of the local mentality, including the notion of female honour and greater emphasis on the protection of female virginity before marriage, as a result of which female service in these areas was seen as a humiliating or even disgraceful experience (p. 359).

<sup>10</sup> In western Poland only 6% of maids and 10% of farmhands were over 30.

following the author, that there was no such thing as retirement in Poland's rural communities in the east (p. 511). To a large extent the same differences could be observed among women.

Szołtysek's research has highlighted — significantly, in a broad geographical spectrum — the relatively small size of eighteenth-century peasant households, smaller in the west, 5.31 people on average (5.99 dwellers/house) and only slightly bigger in the east, especially in Polessya — 6.43 people (6.52 dwellers/house). Thus his findings do not confirm the existence in Poland-Lithuania of residential groups resembling the great Slavic *zadruga* or Russian *dvors*. On this basis he advocates the use, in further population estimates in Poland and Lithuania, of a model ratio of six persons to one rural hearth (p. 605). Although the average sizes of peasant households did not differ much territorially, yet, as Szołtysek points out and what is worthy of note, their internal structure was quite different. In western Poland (with slight exceptions) the household corresponded to the total domination of residential groups with just one nuclear family. Only 15% of households in the region were made up of two related families living under the same roof, while cohabiting groups of relatives made up of more than two nuclear families were a rarity in the west (less than 1%). In the eastern regions of the Polish-Lithuanian state, on the other hand, the complexity of household rises drastically, although the south-eastern borderlands cannot be regarded as a uniform territory in this respect. Generally, we see here more households consisting of two families and sometimes accounting for as much as over one-third of the total. However, in Polessya, for example, over 60% of all households were made up of two or more nuclear families.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, we cannot say that there was a tendency in the eastern regions, so marked in western Poland, to share the living space only with the most immediate and few more distant relatives.

Later on in the book the author draws the reader's attention to analyses of regional differences in the structure of complex domestic, polynuclear groups, including analyses of cohabitation of relatives. The contrast between the western and the eastern part of the Polish-Lithuanian state was evident. In Polessya the share of co-resident groups of relatives was particularly high, as they represented as many as one-third of the population. This growth, as Szołtysek's research demonstrates, was caused by a sharp rise in the four categories of co-resident relatives of the head of the household: siblings, sons and sons-in-law, nephews/nieces and grandchildren. As the author adds, among the relatives in all regions of Poland-Lithuania women were more numerous (about 70 men per 100 women).

Detailed analyses of marital and family circumstances of co-resident relatives to be found in Szołtysek's study have revealed a huge variety of possible combinations as well as their intensity. Nevertheless, they appear to be struc-

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<sup>11</sup> Every sixth household in the region comprised as many as three related families (p. 606).

tured regionally, which, according to the author, would suggest that there were significant differences in the organization of co-resident kin in various parts of the pre-partition Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (p. 639).

The findings presented in Szoltysek's latest book are far broader than those only briefly outlined in this review. Generally, the book reveals that towards the end of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth there were at least three different family models (p. 772), although the author is more inclined to suggest a unique Polish-Lithuanian family model, i.e. a model that is neither Russian nor German, but that can be common to several other societies in Central and Eastern Europe. Significantly, the research discussed here has also revealed a strong correspondence between the religious east-west division and the family organization in the Polish-Lithuanian state, for in regions dominated by the Greek Catholic Church domestic groups and their situation were much more complex than in predominantly Catholic regions, although the author rightly points out that further research and interpretation are needed here.

As we read any book with such broad research objectives, we have, of course, quite a lot of questions and doubts (over for example not very precise source terminology concerning some household members that may distort the image of the family structure, or not very precise recording of kinship ties). However, they stem, as I have already mentioned, primarily from the extensive nature of the source base and its varied scholarly value, which in turn creates various possibilities of reconstruction and interpretation. What may be the most serious shortcoming of Szoltysek's valuable analyses is the virtual elimination from these analyses of the impact of the socio-economic structure of the Polish-Lithuanian peasantry. There is no great need to argue that, especially in the late feudal period, the formation of the family, its duration as well as size of its household differed markedly depending on the social and professional status of the family members. Parts of the book that are important but also debatable are those in which the author tries to explain the differences in the marriage formation patterns in the western and eastern regions of the Polish-Lithuanian state (pp. 458–84). The most important thing, however, is the fact that Szoltysek's monograph represents modern scholarship, still — as I would like to stress — underrepresented in Polish historiography; it provides a very competent introduction to the whole material and the subject matter in question. On the other hand the author formulates his final conclusions — from the perspective of the legitimacy of the concept of the historical region called 'Central and Eastern Europe' — in a rather cautious manner, encouraging further research into the areas between Germany and Russia, as well as further discussion.

Szoltysek's study is not only successful but also very needed, both by Polish and, perhaps even more so, foreign scholars, who often are inclined — drawing on very modest foundations — to infer *a priori* conclusions concerning differences in the social development of people living in pre-partition Poland. The book under review is a serious step forward in research into old Polish family

forms and residence patterns against a European background,<sup>12</sup> for it brings a lot of substantively and methodologically important observations, and considerably expands our current knowledge of the structures of peasant families and their households. Let us hope that it will be followed by more Polish studies using this type of archive material on such a scale for other social groups and for other periods.

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<sup>12</sup> When it comes to family organization on the old continent, Szoltysek firmly rejects the diving line proposed by Hajnal, Mitterauer and others, and running across the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, from the north-east to the south-west. Instead, he draws the line completely differently, that is from the north-west to the south-east (p. 783).